

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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People urged to avoid toxic algal blooms in eastern North Carolina waters

RALEIGH – State officials are urging people to avoid contact with toxic algal blooms in and around the Albemarle Sound after tests revealed that the algae contains a toxin that can be harmful to people or animals.

Staff in the state Division of Water Resources' Washington Regional office sampled the algal bloom in the Chowan River on Wednesday and sent the sample to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, or DHHS, for toxin testing. DHHS has completed its test results, which show that the algae contain microcystin that can be harmful to people who come into contact with it.

Algal samples collected from the Chowan River have been identified by DENR biologists as *Microcystis aeruginosa*, a colonial bluegreen alga. This alga is visible as green specks distributed throughout the water column but most noticeable when it collects on the surface forming thick films and swirls.

North Carolina has had no reports of adverse health effects in people associated with these algal blooms. The algal blooms have turned up in waters in Bertie, Chowan, Hertford, Perquimans and Washington counties.

While it is safe to boat or fish in the affected areas, the N.C. Division of Public Health routinely encourages the public to avoid contact with large accumulations of the algae and prevent children and pets from swimming or ingesting water in an algal bloom.

State health and water quality officials reiterate the following steps to safeguard pets and children from any potentially harmful algal bloom:

- Keep children and pets away from water that appears bright green, discolored or scummy. Do not handle or touch large mats of algae.
- Avoid handling, cooking or eating dead fish that may be present.
- If you come into contact with an algal bloom, wash thoroughly. Also, use clean water to rinse off pets that may have come into contact with an algal bloom.
- If your child appears ill after being in waters containing an algal bloom, seek medical care immediately.
- If your pet appears to stumble, stagger or collapse after being in a pond, lake or river, seek veterinary care immediately.

For more information on the potential health effects from algal blooms, visit the N.C. Division of Public Health's website at: <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oe/algae/protect.html>. To learn more about algae, visit the N.C. Division of Water Resources' website at: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/wq/ess/eco/blooms>. For health-related questions about this incident, contact the Bertie County Health Department at 252-338-4400.